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**Review of: D.L. D'Avray, Rationalities in History: A Weberian Essay in Comparison (New York: Cambridge University Press 2010)**

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can be best understood by what he calls “reconstructive separatism”; it is separatist without associating itself with a worldless modern subject, and it is reconstructionist without being an abstract postmodern “religion without religion.” His reading of new phenomenology as a broadening of philosophy that allows for God-talk not only provides a fine analysis of what unites these disparate thinkers, but more germane to the aims of his project, it shows that the kind of excising of theology from the supposed neutral and presuppositionless domain of pure phenomenology advocated by Janicaud and others mirrors the same desire to excise religion from the supposed neutral, presuppositionless domain of the public square.

The third and final part of the book, then, is devoted to tracing and extending the insights of his reconstructive separatist reading of new phenomenology into politics. The chapter entitled “Politics as an Ethico-Religious Task—Reconsidering Religion in the Public Square” is, in my estimation, the real climax and most original research of the book, where Simmons makes the compelling argument that politics is fundamentally an ethico-religious task of justice and not merely a space of neutral inter-subjective interaction.

One possible criticism of this otherwise fine tome is that in Simmons’s desire to base politics on an ethico-religious vision and thereby show the relevance of new phenomenology to the public square, he often appears to take liberties with their thought. He introduces new terminology such as “ontology of constitutive responsibility” and a “modest foundationalism” so as to provide a stabilized and sustainable ground and basis for selfhood, and he reads out of new phenomenology an understanding of politics that is neither simply negative critique, nor an open-ended and indeterminate utopian vision for the future, but also one of positive and actual transformation of it. Not only do the terminology and the position seem at odds or at least in tension with thinkers such as Levinas and Derrida, but as Simmons himself recognizes, the discussion of politics as such is less explicit in the works of Marion, Henry, and Lacoste. This is all to say, however, that Simmons is engaged in the constructive task of extending their thoughts into new areas by probing the possible import of their works for political theory. There are many attempts to apply new phenomenologists too far and too quickly, but it seems to me that Simmons’s work does so responsibly, carefully distinguishing where new phenomenology ends and where he begins, and he does so plausibly. His work combines a command of the literature in new phenomenology with a versatility and creativity that offers suggestive new spaces for research. This book is recommended not only to those with interests in new phenomenology but also to anyone interested in the ongoing debate and discussion on what relationship, if any, religion should have in the public sphere.

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D’AVRAY, D. L. *Rationalities in History: A Weberian Essay in Comparison*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 214 pp. \$29.95 (paper).

Some books on the history of knowledge make humble aims at proving the relevance (or not) of a specific thinker, or rather one specific work of a thinker, in a well-defined period. Not this one. Take, for instance, the opening sentence: “The aim of the present work is to develop a concept of value rationality that helps explain why people hold on doggedly to their convictions; to balance this with observations on how values nonetheless do change; to bring out the interdependence of instrumental and value rationality; to discredit special associations of formal rationality with ‘modernity’; and to show how value-driven instrumental reasoning draws lines

between formal and substantive legal rationality" (1). Grand ambitions like these are often made in a defensive mode. We are less rational than we think we are (or less sophisticated, less learned than we used to be), or the opposite, freed from church and psychological pressure, we represent the ultrarational and ultrapostmodern spirit. But David d'Avray's book is doing more here than exploring such boundaries of rationality, and this book is not just another overview of the impact of Weber on disciplinary thinking in the humanities. It should furthermore be added that this book represents the second part of a diptych, the other "panel" bearing the title *Medieval Religious Rationalities: A Weberian Analysis* (also published by Cambridge University Press in 2010).

Trained as a medievalist, the author raises in this double-edged project central questions about historically determined tensions between religion and reason, which he sees as a problem of globalization that is more complex than the analytical tradition of Anglo-American scholarship allows for (11). The author's background as a scholar in medieval history proves to be useful in approaching this central problem and allows him to raise questions that surpass the limits of both the historical period and its traditional approaches. How far can rationality help us to understand the "irrationality" of religion? What limits should we place on our reinterpretation of it in a past that goes beyond the sunlit place of Enlightenment? When Kant wrote "Everything in Nature operates according to laws" (*ein jedes Ding der Natur wirkt nach Gesetzen*, as quoted by D'Avray on p. 16), he certainly did not have an atheist in mind, but someone who should appreciate that the thing-in-itself is not knowable. For Kant, I believe, the human faculty of thinking was to discuss its very limits. Although he does not discuss the problem of the limits of knowledge in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, David d'Avray does turn to the above-mentioned quote from Kant in giving a rough sketch of a definition of rationality (D'Avray regularly insists on the explicit essayistic character of his book). "Thus rationality," he states, "will be defined here as thinking which involves some general principles and strives for internal consistency" (16). After this statement, D'Avray turns swiftly to the other side of the coin, to irrationality, molding the two separated categories into a kind of unity in which the one feature adds a dimension to the other. *Rationalities in History* does not argue that the world is getting more rational. It also provides some clues why: its sketchy method offers, layer after layer, more understanding for the complexity of what it is to know. It seems to me that the "Weberian comparison" D'Avray draws serves more as an instrument to acquire insight into complexity of knowledge than it serves as a dogmatic principle. D'Avray's explanations range from the *rational choice theory* and the apparently trivial *prisoner's dilemma*, "which is actually quite close to real life as well as to numerous police interrogations on television programmes" (37), to momentous historical events like the sixteenth-century Council of Trent that aimed to uniform the dogmatic structure of Catholic faith and to condemn Protestantism (the Latin text of its congregation is provided as a whole in the annex, 189–96). Or from topics such as the "ethics and the formal rationality of traditional Chinese law" (152) to "Hume, miracles and concrete thought" (89).

I said at the outset that D'Avray has written an ambitious book, and I firmly believe that scholarship in the field of humanities deserves more intellectually daring projects such as these, going beyond historically limited topics that treat more of the same. In my view, people might respond to the widely divergent topics as raised by D'Avray, with some quite pertinent questions. If the aim of exploring a history of rationality is more important than ever, it also needs to be explored in a way that goes beyond the twinned historiographical pillars of irrationality (or religion) and reason. There is a lot of ambivalence about this question in *Rationalities in History*. On the one hand, some of the "value rationalities" that d'Avray charts in chapters 2–4 have

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enhanced the rational nature of the Enlightenment and its founding effects on modern thought (cf. Jonathan Israel, 84). On the other hand, D'Avray's discussion of miracles reveals sympathy for what he says is the credit of anthropology "making sense of peculiar customs," "but many . . . scholars will think in their heart of hearts that Western rationality is superior because it allows for refutation by empirical evidence" (83). More generally, David d'Avray is not ambivalent when it comes to the importance of medieval doctrine such as that of Thomas Aquinas. Therefore, it is difficult to grasp the real scope and ambition of this book without the help of the other part of his diptych project, regardless of the intellectual implications of his thought experiment in this volume.

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CUNNINGHAM, CONOR. *Darwin's Pious Idea: Why the Ultra-Darwinists and Creationists Both Get It Wrong*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010. xx+543 pp. \$35.00 (cloth).

With the 1990 publication of *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, John Milbank launched "Radical Orthodoxy" onto the stage of contemporary religious thought. This British-led theological movement seeks, on the one hand, to challenge modern secularism by historicizing it within the context of Christianity and seeks, on the other, to uphold the gains of modernity by grounding them within a patristic and medieval orthodoxy. For instance, *Theology and Social Theory* devotes eleven chapters to offering a historicized critique of modern political and social theory, interpreting them as rooted in a series of late medieval theological errors, and then concludes by outlining an Augustinian-type conception of the body politic, one that grounds the modern affirmation of the worldly in the divine. Milbank's approach involves a postmodern blurring of reason and revelation, what Henri de Lubac calls supernaturalizing the natural. Radical Orthodoxy may thus be summarily described as a postmodern attempt to rescue the modern world by reconnecting it to a premodern ontology.

Conor Cunningham, one of Milbank's former students at Cambridge and now one of his colleagues at Nottingham, follows in the wake of Radical Orthodoxy by focusing here on the legacy of Charles Darwin. If Darwin's evolutionary insight is one of the great gains of modernity, then this insight is gravely distorted both by ultra-Darwinists, like Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett, and by misguided religious perspectives, which espouse creationism or intelligent design. In fact, these polar alternatives are both rooted in modern positivism. This "unholy alliance of atheists and religious fundamentalists," declares Cunningham, "misconstrues Darwin's theory," which, if properly understood, is a "pious idea" that "is of great service to Christian religion" (xvi). Though the book's subtitle mentions both sides of this "unholy alliance," the volume is principally devoted to offering a sustained critique of ultra-Darwinism, which Cunningham defines as the attempt to turn Darwin's biological insight into a universal philosophy. Akin to *Theology and Social Theory*, Cunningham presents six chapters assessing various aspects of ultra-Darwinism followed by a conclusion that retrieves patristic and medieval understandings of nature.

Specifically, chapter 1 introduces ultra-Darwinism as the "received view" in the contemporary academy, one which turns Darwin's thought into what Dennett famously calls a "universal acid" and one that Cunningham argues nihilistically dissolves all that it comes in contact with (1–4). Chapter 2 challenges Dawkins's view that the "selfish gene" is the definitive unit of selection in nature. This "genetic reductionism" overstates the situation, for each level of nature, including human activity, introduces its own genuine logic into the evolving natural equation (75–78).